

Chapter 1

The clock counted 15 minutes to midnight. The atmosphere in the club was hot, the waitresses were carrying glowing trays of drinks, the shots were lined up at the bar, and the rhythm of Armin van Buuren made all the bottles behind the bar shake.

"Hey, can you take over? I need a break?" a young woman grabbed one of batman's forearm.

"What now? But it's almost midnight?"

"So?" She shrugged.

"Aren't you a happy bunny, go on, go"

"Thanks" she smiled and grabbed her IQOS from the counter.

She pushed through the crowd to the back door and out into a narrow back alley. The heat inside the club was unbearable. Her braid was all messy, and her black shirt was stuck to her body. Welcoming the fresh December air outside, she leaned against the wall, lit a cigarette, and took out her phone from the back pocket of her black jeans. It was already full of messages, and she got frustrated by deleting all notifications and immediately got on to TikTok. Slightly focused on the random videos she was scrolling through she heard the countdown from the inside of the club. Then a few minutes later the metal door slammed open, and a young woman ran out followed by a tall man. She didn't pay too much attention and returned to her phone, but her concentration was interrupted by a couple arguing not even five meters from her. She tried desperately to switch off, but the fight was getting more intense, so her mind kept drifting in that direction. Then suddenly she heard a slap, and it got her full attention.

"Pleaseeeee you're hurting me" the woman shouted as the man grabbed her forearm dragging her back into the club.

She put the phone back in her pocket, threw away the cigarette and put away the IQOS.

"Pleaseeeee, I wanna home"

"Stop being hysterical!" The man shook her by the arm "You're imbaressing me. The fucking state of you"

"Oi!" She shouted. Which was probably the dumbest idea "Is there a problem sir?"

"What?" he turned around, surprised to see her at all. Apparently not even noticing her presence right next to them

"Sir, I think you should let the lady go. Are you ok Ma'am? Do you need help?" She asked, but the woman looked back at her like a deer caught in headlights, her makeup was smeared from crying, and her blonde hair was stuck to her face.

"Piss off!" He said and pulled the woman towards the door so hard she almost fell to the floor.

But she blocked his path to the door "Sir I suggest you let her go"

"Fuck off!"

"Right, that's it" she reached into her pocket and took her Identification card.

"Oh, you gotta be kidding me?"

The young woman raised an eyebrow.

"Look I don't want any trouble" he said as he released the woman.

"Right..." she said and turned towards the woman "Ma'am, would you like me to take his details? Do you feel threatened?"

"Nooo please I don't want any trouble. I just want him to leave me alone. Pleaseeee I just wanna go home" she looked at him pleading.

"Are you absolutely sure you don't want me to file a report?"

"Yes, yes I'm sure" she replied skittishly not taking her eyes off him.

"Well, it seems like tonight is your lucky night. Consider this a warning."

"Absolutely officer"

"Go, get lost" she nodded towards the door, and he glanced at the other woman.

"Oh, she's staying right here."

"Right, happy New Year"

She rolled her eyes when he left and refocused on the woman. She was shivering from the cold, her skimpy dress covering barely any bit of skin and looking skinny as a chopstick.

"You're freezing, come on, let's get inside. I'm Yaz"

"Theta" she smiled and reached out a shaking hand

"Nice to meet you Theta...that's unusual name."

"My dad's a Whovian....I need to sort myself out."

"Sure follow me. I know just a place."

"Come" she grabbed the woman's hand and dragged her through the crowd and up the metal stairs leading up above the bar to the next level. They went through the narrow maze of hallways and she led them through the door straight into the bathroom.

"This is for the staff. You're safe here."

"Thank you so much. I appreciate it" said the woman on the verge of tears and went straight to the sink. Yaz stood by the door watching her wash off her makeup, still visibly shaken. He then examined her hand where the man had held a grip on it. Yaz wondered how many times this happened before, and what would've happened if she wasn't there to stop it.

"Did you come with a car?" She asked quietly.

"Arrrh...yeah but not my car"

"Do you need a lift home?"

"I can take a cab...It's fine."

"You shouldn't be taking cabs alone at this time. It's no big deal. I can take you home. My car is around the corner."

The woman took a handful of paper towels and dried her face "That's really sweet of you. Thank you, but honestly, it's not a problem. " She smiled looking in the mirror towards Yaz.

"It's alright, no bother, I'll take you, just need to let Tony know."

"Thanks." She exhaled relieved and turned "God so sorry. This is so embarrassing" she said covering her face with hands.

"Don't be silly. Nothing to apologize for. But I do have to ask you, are you living with..."

"Nooo....no I live alone."

"Sorry I was just worried..."

"It's fine I appreciate it."

"Wanna go?"

"Yeah, suppose I should" she smiled and pulled the short black dress down as much as she could.

"Let me just take my stuff."

"Ok"

She led her pass the bar and stopped off for a moment.

"Tony!!" She yelled and got his attention straight away.

"Hey happy New Year...where the fuck have you been?"

"Yeah, listen I've got a problem I have to leave."

"Whaaa, why? Oh, come ooon" he whined then saw a woman begin her "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah...Don't worry about it, just please cover for me. I'm sorry"

"Yeah sure....no problem. Do you need help?"

"No, I'm fine. I'll call you tomorrow."

"Sure"

"Let's go" Yaz nodded her head and led them through the crowd again

"Theta!" The man called and Yaz immediately turned around "Hey come oon, don't leave. I'm sorry babe" he grabbed her hand tugging on her.

"Pleaseeeee, just leave me" she put her hand on his chest pushing him away.

"Hey, are we gonna have a problem again?"

"Aaar fuck, what is it with you?"

"Theta?" Yaz asked, holding out her hand, hoping she would take it. But she also knew it was completely out of her hands if she didn't.

The woman stood frozen for a moment, then looked at the man one last time and took Yaz's hand. She sighed in relief and quickly pulled her before she changed her mind.

"Do you have a coat?" She asked on a way out.

"No, it's in a car"

"A shit...Here" she took her puffer jacket off and draped it across her shoulders "Take it"

"Nooo....what about you?"

"I've got long sleeves, you on the other hand are hardly dressed." She pointed finger up and down her length

"Thaaaaank youuuu."

They walked quickly to the car, Theta trying to keep up in her high heels with Yaz wearing a pair of lace-up boots.

"So, what's a cop doing behind the bar for New Year's eve?"

"My mate has COVID and they are down on staff. My brother is a manager."

"Ooooh...cool. That's nice of you." she sped up shaking holding the front of the jacket with her hands.

"I hate New Year's eve so it's not like I'm missing anything. Why are you not putting on the jacket?" Yaz looked at her confused.

"Dunno, some people are particular about other people wearing their clothes."

"Oh, my good...just put that on properly" she grabbed the jacket and held it up for her "And zip it up properly. Are you hungry?" She smiled "Cause I'm starving."

"I could do with some chips" Theta smiled with her blue lips and rosy cheeks.

"Good cause I'm freezing" she giggled "There's a place around the corner then we only have 2 minutes to the car."

"Brilliant"

"Are you sure you want just chips?" Yaz asked as they cued up.

"I suppose I could do with a burger as well" she scrunched her nose.

"I thought so" she smiled and took her purse out.

"Nooo...I'll pay."

"Don't be silly."

"No please, its at least I could do."

"Alright but just this time"

"There's gonna be a next time?" She smiled silly.

"Could be" she giggled "It's up to you."

"Ma'am" the man at counter interrupted them.

"Right, what will you have?"

"Chicken burger menu and coke"

"Goodie, and I'll have just a plain burger and chips.
with coke. Oh, and mayo"

They sat down and Theta took Yaz's coat off carefully leaving it on chair next to her.

"Why are you so sweet to me?" She asked as she was peeling a straw.

"Don't know what you're talking about. I was just doing my job" she winked at her smiling "So what's the story with that dipstick?"

Theta laughed at her audacity, looking down as she tore apart her burger tossing the tomatoes.

"I suppose I have a lousy taste in men."

"No shit"

"It all kicked off before we even went out. Actually, it's been kicking off for a while now. Then he was acting like an ass the whole night and I told him I was leaving him"

"And are you...leaving him?"

"Yeah..." she smiled and bit on her burger "What about you? You seem smart, bet you have better taste in men."

"I don't have taste in men" she said and stuffed a chip in her mouth.

"Oh, I see, guess women are better...smart."

"Sometimes"

"So how come you decided to be a police officer?"

"My dad owns a corner shop. We kept getting trouble...Guess I had enough one day. What do you do?"

"Mmmmm..." she wiped the mayo from her lips and speeded up the chewing

"Mmmm...I'm a lawyer."

"Waaaw....smart then."

"Yeah right.... Guess we saw that tonight."

"Ok, academically smart.... I didn't say street wise" she laughed

"Thanks"

"Don't mention it" she laughed.

Yaz parked up in front the block of flats. Suddenly there was silence in the car and Theta seemed reluctant to leave the car. She sat there as the car engine kept running and it took a moment for Yaz to realize what's going on.

"You alright?"

"He's got the keys."

"Oh...You want me to..."

"Yes, pleaseeee if you could!" She practically jumped off the seat.

"Sure" Yaz turned off the car and followed her up the stairs to the first floor. She saw her hands suddenly shake as she got more and more nervous opening the door. The lights were off and Theta quickly turned them on. Yaz flinched when a small Shih Tzu ran up to them as soon as they entered.

"Hey honey.... sorry. I know I know...I'm terrible" she picked up the dog and smiled "This is Lola."

"Hi Lola, nice to meet you" Yaz reached out cuddling the dog.

"I got her from Mark, last time we had an argument. She's only six months old."

"Oh, Is that his name."

"Yeah, Mark the dipstick" she laughed "Come in please."

It was a beautiful apartment, not too big, but spacious with a large kitchen connected to the living room. Newly furnished, relatively modern with replica retro furniture from the 60s. Large cream couch and brown kitchen cabinets. A small desk in the corner with a computer and Yaz couldn't help but notice a framed photo of Theta on the desk with her now, hopefully, ex-boyfriend. The windows of the living room looked towards the park at the back.

"The bedroom is that way" she pointed.

"The lights?"

"I leave them for Lola."

"Aaa ok" she exhaled relieved.

She walked in and felt a little uncomfortable walking through private space, but she wanted the other woman to feel safe. It was a small room with built-in wardrobes and a large cream bed. Heavy curtains on the windows and a small bathroom in the corner. She noticed loads of clothes on the bed, left from when Theta was getting ready earlier on. And makeup, still left on the bathroom shelf.

"It's all clear. Pleaseeee lock the door."

"I will"

"leave the key inside and you should change your lock as soon as possible."

"I was thinking that. I will now after holidays"

"And don't open for anyone. If you have any trouble, call me. I'll give you, my number."

"Aaaaa, I was gonna ask you for that."

"I would suggest avoiding him. But it's up to you."

"Thanks...seriously I really appreciate everything. You're so sweet. I'm fine now. I was just so scared."

"I'm not surprised. I should go now, oh number."

They quickly exchanged numbers and Yaz was on her way. She sat in a car wondering if she was ever going to see Theta again. It was rare she clicked with someone from the first minute like she did with her, and it was a nice change.

It was almost two in the morning when she came home and she opened the door of her small flat exhausted, throwing the keys to the kitchen top and went straight to fridge to get some juice. Then her phone rang, and she quickly picked it up.

"You alright?" She answered worried.

"Yeah, sorry...we forgot your jacket."

Yaz smiled and signed relieved "OMG I completely forgot."

"Me too, I'm so sorry. Hey, I thought, I don't know if anything is open tomorrow, but you can come over and we could cook something or order something in."

"Really?"

"Yeaaaaah if you'd like that?"

"I'd love that."

"Cool, two?"

"Two is fine"

"I just wanted to say thank you one more time. That was the nicest thing anyone has done for me."

"It was my pleasure. See you tomorrow then?"

"I'm looking forward to that."

"Me too. Night, night "

"Night, night Yaz"

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